

*Kevin Carbery, Jefferson County Journal*

Do not expect the immigration issue to fade away just because legislation died in the United States Senate last month.

U.S. Rep. Russ Carnahan, D-St. Louis, made that point, among others, during a recent interview on immigration.

"This is going to continue to be a big issue in our country until we do something," Carnahan said. "First and foremost, we have to secure our borders, do a better job with that. We have an estimated 15 to 20 million illegal immigrants."

The Senate bill, which had been backed by President George Bush, had been created by a bipartisan group of senators and administration officials. It would have allowed for millions of undocumented immigrants to stay in the country legally, eventually becoming citizens. It also would have significantly increased the country's guest-worker program.

That bill was the second failed attempt in the Senate during June to pass new immigration legislation.

Now, the U.S. House of Representatives may be the center of future immigration legislation attempts, said Carnahan, who supports comprehensive immigration reform.

"I'm hoping we can resolve this, this year," he said. "The plan, I think, was to have the Senate take this up first, because they looked like they'd have a harder time with it."

"I'm sure that we'll be looking at it again when we get back this week, to determine a strategy."

The illegal immigration situation is particularly troubling, Carnahan said, because it is difficult to understand how so many people are able to keep entering this nation illegally when modern technology should make it easier to detect such occurrences.

"There is a lot of new technology that can be used in detecting illegal border crossings," he said.

Carnahan said that government agencies given the tasks of processing immigration requests should be doing a better job.

"We also need to address the problem of the various government agencies charged with processing requests for immigration," the congressman said. "That has to be addressed as part of this."

Those who have come to the United States through illegal means should have to go through the

correct process to be here, Carnahan said.

"Many people who have played by the rules have had to wait for years to gain citizenship," he said. "We have to work out what to do with the illegal aliens who are here."

Carnahan added that new immigration legislation needs to cover those who knowingly hire illegal immigrants.

"We have to make sure that employers are playing by the rules," he said. "Better enforcement with employers to make sure they are not exploiting workers."

While Missouri does not share a border with Mexico, the immigration issue matters to many in this state, Carnahan said.

"One of the biggest things I'm hearing from constituents is that they want to see the immigration laws enforced," he said. "(Illegal immigration) really does impact us in so many ways, from our border security to the workplace, schools, health care.

"I'd say (Missouri) is very representative of how it's impacting the rest of the country. We are not a border state. I think, other than that, we are very representative of it."

© Copyright 2007